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**Teen Methamphetamine Use, Cigarette Smoking at Lowest Levels in
NIDA's 2009 Monitoring the Future Survey**

Downward Marijuana Trend Stalls and Prescription Drug Abuse Worrisome

WASHINGTON – Methamphetamine use among teens appears to have dropped significantly in recent years, according to NIDA's annual Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey, released today at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington. However, declines in marijuana use have stalled, and prescription drug abuse remains high, the survey reported.

The Monitoring the Future survey is a series of classroom surveys of eighth, 10th, and 12th graders conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health.

The number of high school seniors reporting they used methamphetamine in the past year is now at only 1.2 percent--the lowest since questions about methamphetamine were added to the survey in 1999, when it was reported at 4.7 percent. In addition, the proportion of 10th graders reporting that crystal meth was easy to obtain has dropped to 14 percent, down from 19.5 percent five years ago.

“We are encouraged by the reduction of methamphetamine use, but we know that each new generation of teens brings unique prevention and education challenges,” said NIH Director Francis S. Collins M.D., Ph.D. “What makes the Monitoring the Future survey such a valuable public health tool is that it not only helps us identify where our prevention efforts have been successful, it also helps us identify new trends in drug use and attitudes that need more attention.”

The report says cigarette smoking was at the lowest point in the survey's history on all measures for eighth, 10th and 12th graders. For example, only 2.7 percent of eighth graders describe themselves as daily smokers, down from a peak rate of 10.4 percent in 1996. Similarly, 11.2 percent of high school seniors say they smoke daily, less than half of the 24.6 percent rate in 1997. However, one area of concern is the rate of smokeless tobacco use. The rate of 10th

graders using smokeless tobacco in the past month is 6.5 percent, up from last year and the same as it was in 1999.

“The decline in cigarette smoking translates to longer, healthier lives for today’s young people,” said NIDA Director Dr. Nora Volkow. “And while it is disheartening that smokeless tobacco use is up again, the survey is telling us where to focus prevention efforts.”

Marijuana use across the three grades has shown a consistent downward trend since the mid-1990s, however, the decline has stalled, with rates at the same level as five years ago. In the 2009 survey, reported past year marijuana use was about the same as the previous year: 32.8 percent of 12th graders, 26.7 percent of 10th graders, and 11.8 percent of eighth graders. However, marijuana use is still down significantly from its peak in the mid-late 1990s.

The MTF survey also measures teen attitudes about drugs, including perceived harmfulness, perceived availability, and disapproval, which are often harbingers of abuse. For example, the percentage of eighth graders who view occasional marijuana smoking as potentially harmful is down to 44.8 percent, compared to 48.1 percent last year and 57.9 percent in 1991.

“The 2009 Monitoring the Future survey is a warning sign, and the continued erosion in youth attitudes and behavior toward substance abuse should give pause to all parents and policymakers,” said Director Gil Kerlikowske, of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. “Considering the troublesome data from other national and local surveys, these latest data confirm that we must redouble our efforts to implement a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to preventing and treating drug use.”

The data on some illicit drugs is encouraging. Past year use of cocaine decreased to 3.4 percent from 4.4 percent in 2008 among 12th graders, and past year use of hallucinogens also fell among high school seniors to 4.7 percent, down from last year’s 5.9 percent rate and significantly lower than its 2001 peak of 9.1 percent.

For the first time this year the survey also measured 12th graders’ use of the hallucinogenic salvia leaf, with 5.7 percent of high school seniors reporting past year use.

Perceived harmfulness of LSD, amphetamines, sedatives/barbiturates, heroin and cocaine have all increased among 12th graders, and the perceived availability of many illicit drugs has dropped considerably. For example, 33.9 percent of 12th graders reported this year that it is easy to get powder cocaine, down from 38.9 percent just a year ago. Similarly, 35.1 percent of 12th graders said ecstasy is easy to obtain, compared to 41.9 percent last year.

The 2009 MTF survey indicates a continuing high rate of non-medical use of prescription drugs and cough syrup among teens. Seven of the top 10 drugs abused by 12th graders in the year prior to the survey were prescribed or, purchased over the counter.

Nearly 1 in 10 high school seniors reported past year non-medical use of Vicodin, and 1 in 20 reported abusing Oxycontin, also a powerful opioid painkiller. Non-medical use of these painkillers has increased among 10th graders in the past five years.

For the first time this year the survey measured the non-medical use of Adderall, a stimulant commonly prescribed to treat ADHD. The survey reported that more than 5 percent of 10th and 12th graders reported non-medical use of the drug in the past year.

In addition, the survey recently started measuring how teens obtain the prescription drugs they took for non-medical use. Nineteen percent of 12th graders reported they got their drugs by a doctor's prescription, and 8 percent reported buying them from a dealer. However, the vast majority---66 percent---said they got the drugs from a friend or relative. Of these, 12 percent reported they "took" them; 21 percent reported "buying" them and 33 percent said they were "given" the drugs. Internet purchases do not appear to be a major source of drugs for this age group.

Researchers also report a softening of attitudes in some alcohol measures. Fewer 10th graders viewed weekend binge drinking (five or more drinks once or twice each weekend) as harmful, and fewer high school seniors disapproved of having one or two drinks every day. Alcohol use however, has decreased in the past five years across all three grades.

Overall, 46,097 students from 389 public and private schools in the eighth, 10th, and 12th grades participated in this year's survey. Since 1975, the MTF survey has measured drug, alcohol, and cigarette use and related attitudes in 12th graders nationwide; eighth and 10th graders were added to the survey in 1991. Survey participants report their drug use behaviors across three time periods: lifetime, past year, and past month. The survey has been conducted since its inception by a team of investigators at the University of Michigan, led by NIDA grantee Dr. Lloyd Johnston. Additional information on the MTF, as well as comments from Dr. Volkow can be found at www.drugabuse.gov.

MTF is one of three major surveys sponsored by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services that provide data on substance use among youth, along with the National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The MTF Web site is <http://monitoringthefuture.org>. More information on MTF can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>; or <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the primary source of statistical information on substance use in the U.S. population 12 years of age and older. More information is available at <http://www.drugabusestatistics.samhsa.gov>.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey, part of HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, is a school-based survey that collects data from students in grades 9-12. The survey includes questions on a wide variety of health-related risk behaviors, including substance abuse. More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm>.

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The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy and improve practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at www.drugabuse.gov. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's new DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or fax or email requests to 240-645-0227 or drugpubs@nida.nih.gov. Online ordering is available at <http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov>. NIDA's new media guide can be found at <http://drugabuse.gov/mediaguide>.

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